

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1954

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of March 8, 1954

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1954 PRODUCTIONS

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST

NEW YORK MIRROR

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Girl in Pink Tights"

New York Post

March 7, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

A French Star Called Jeanmaire

The theater is quite a place for career girls this season. Friday night at the Mark Hellinger, a large, handsome and elaborate musical extravaganza called "The Girl in Pink Tights" had its local premiere, and, in the title role, the sprightly young French ballerina, familiar to film audiences, who is satisfied to be known simply as Jeanmaire, scored a vast, resounding and entirely justified personal triumph which, in a somewhat different fashion, is almost as impressive as that recently registered by Audrey Hepburn, who also began as a dancer.

The chief news of the evening is unquestionably Jeanmaire, which is a good thing for "The Girl in Pink Tights," because otherwise the report on the new show must be considerably qualified. It is certainly handsome and colorful, with attractive sets by Eldon Elder and effective period costumes by Miles White, and the music, which was written by the late Sigmund Romberg, is in that celebrated composer's characteristic vein. But the lyrics seem older than the setting of the book, which is immediate post-Civil War, and the book, too, has its troubles.

The Narrative

This latter weakness seems particularly unfortunate, not only

because Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, the librettists, ordinarily have a notable talent for musical comedy narratives, but also because the idea for "The Girl in Pink Tights" offers such interesting possibilities. It deals with an entertaining period in American theatrical annals, when "The Black Crook," a famous pioneer among the nation's musical shows, was being produced, and it gives a fine chance for satire, nostalgia and picturesque Americana in general, which, I fear, it misses.

Although Agnes de Mille has staged some attractive dance numbers for it and several of the Romberg songs, particularly "Lost in Loveliness" and "Up in the Elevated Railway," are pleasantly tuneful, there is a curious air of heaviness hanging over the proceedings. The Chodorov-Fields narrative plods along with a strange and uncharacteristic lack of imagination and inventiveness, and there are only a few occasions when it lives up to either

Musical comedy with book by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields; music by Sigmund Romberg; lyrics by Leo Robin; staged by Shepard Traube; settings and lighting by Eldon Elder; costumes by Miles White; musical direction by Sylvan Levin; dances by Agnes de Mille; ballet music arranged by Trude Rittman; music developed and orchestrated by Don Walker; presented by Mr. Traube in association with Anthony B. Farrell at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, March 5, 1954. The cast: Maestro Gallo, Charles Goldner Volodya Kuzenstov, Alexandre Kalliojny, Lisette Gervais, Jeanmaire Boris, Joshua Shelley Lotta Leslie, Brenda Lewis Clyde Hallam, David Atkinson

its own potentialities or the entirely delightful talents of its heroine.

The French Girl

Of course, Jeanmaire is a brilliant dancer, but her ability is by no means confined to the ballet. As a rule, I confess to a lack of enthusiasm for these vivacious French girls with their gay sou-brette wiles, and it usually extends to a denial of their acclaimed beauty. But Jeanmaire, who may or may not be a beauty, has an odd loveliness about her, and she has such charm, grace, humor, deftness and general all-around flair that she is always a delight to watch. There is, I think, no doubt that she has ar-

"THE GIRL IN PINK TIGHTS"

Eddington, David Aiken
Hattie Hopkins, Danla Krupska
Van Beuren, Robert Smith
British Tars, Tom Rider and
John Talliaferro

Policeman, John Stamford
Newspaper Boy, Maurice Hines
Shoe Shine Boy, Gregory Hines
Mike, Kalem Kernoyan
Nellie, Lydia Kermoyan
Hollister, Ray Mason
Simone, Katia Gelezanova
Mimi, Eva Rubinstein
Lucette, Lynne Marcus
Odette, Nancy King
Gisele, Lila Popper
Paulette, Mickey Gunnersen
Jenny, Jenny Workman
Blanchette, Beryl Towbin
Emile, Ted Thurston
Gypsy Violinist, Douglas Rideout

rived as a personage in the New York theater.

Her co-star is Charles Goldner, a good actor and an excellent comedian, who has made an understandable name for himself in the English drama. It seems to me that Mr. Goldner is being wasted in the role of the heroine's imperious impresario, which is a great pity, because he deserves far better things. The only other parts of any importance are capably handled by Brenda Lewis as a lady theatrical producer, David Atkinson as the presumable romantic interest, and Alexandre Kalliojny, an excellent dancer. But Jeanmaire is the pleasure of the evening.

DAILY NEWS

March 6, 1954

Jeanmaire Dominates a Big Show As Tiny Star of 'Girl in Pink Tights'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Girl in Pink Tights" is a very big musical for a very little girl, and only an extraordinary little girl like Renee Jeanmaire could triumph over it. And she did have her triumph at last evening's premiere at the Mark Hellinger Theatre—dancing like an angel and singing like a devil.

"The G in P Ts" is a book show—meaning one with a lot of plot so what—with a schmaltzy score by the late Sigmund Romberg, a libretto by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, an enormous and generally attractive lot of scenery by Eldon Elder, some fetching dances staged by Agnes De Mille, lively costumes by Miles White and a number of attractive performers supporting Jeanmaire.

Producers Shepard Traube and Anthony B. Farrell did right in

banking their all—or Farrell's all—on Jeanmaire. She is a remarkably skilled ballerina, a saucy personality and a rather astonishing singer of songs with a style lying somewhere between Edith Piaf and Yvette Guilbert—which, I admit, makes quite a distance between. In her dance numbers she is partnered by a remarkably able young man, Alexandre Kalliojny, and their pas-de-deux is an artistic highlight of a sprawling show.

Could Be History.

The plot is supposed to have a slight resemblance to history—to

the real story of the accidental birth of the American musical comedy, of which "The Black Crook" is supposed to be the first example. In "The Girl in Pink Tights," a French ballet company comes to New York in the late 1860s and begins rehearsing at the Academy of Music for its premiere. At Niblo's Garden, conveniently across the street, an American outfit is rehearsing a Western melodrama of pre-Belasco vintage. The Academy burns down (and it's quite a scenic effect, reminiscent of Cirkor & Robbins), leaving the ballet troupe without a home. The hospitable hams at Niblo's offer a solution: The ballet and its music can be incorporated into the plot of a Western—and that, dear children, is how Rodgers and Hammerstein began.

Brenda Lewis Helps.

In "The Girl in Pink Tights" Jeanmaire wears mostly black tights. Anyhow, I think they were black. To tell the truth, I was looking at her legs most of the time, and didn't particularly notice. She falls in love, obviously, with the hero of the Western at Niblo's—David Atkinson, a handsome and capable baritone. Jeanmaire's ballet impresario, Charles Goldner, must console himself with falling in love with Brenda Lewis, who seems to own Niblo's. With or without Niblo's, Miss Lewis is a target for anybody's affection, for she is something rare in the musical world—a top-grade singer with a genuine sense of humor.

Things are at their happiest at the Mark Hellinger Theatre when Miss De Mille's chorus of dancers is at work. And things are at their funniest when Jeanmaire pulls a switch on the old private dining room scene by trying to seduce a millionaire. Besides being a dancer and a singer, the little lady is a comedienne.

About all I can say concerning the Romberg score is that it didn't hurt.

"The Girl in Pink Tights"—continued

The New York Times

March 6, 1954

AT THE THEATRE

By **BROOKS ATKINSON**

Fortunately Jeanmaire is the star of "The Girl in Pink Tights," which opened at the Mark Hellinger last evening. She goes a long way toward compensating for a clumsy and witless musical show. She is the French young lady with the boyish bob who first devastated this town when she danced Carmen here a few winters ago.

She is a slender girl with a charming grin, a mischievous manner and a willingness to enjoy performing, for she acknowledges an audience's right to have a good time. To tell the truth, she is a Gallic edition of Mary Martin, which is intended to be hand-

somely complimentary all the way round.

Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, authors of "The Girl in Pink Tights," present her as the ballerina of a French troupe that is visiting New York after the Civil War. Credit them with having at least one constructive idea. For the part gives Jeanmaire an opportunity to dance now and then, usually in company with Alexandre Kalliojny, who is excellent also. Note their tender and effortless "Pas de Deux" in the first act—an exquisite number as spontaneous as a lyric.

As a character in a musical plot, Jeanmaire wears a number of jaunty costumes, plays comedy scenes with a wicked gleam and sings the standard love songs of the old-fashioned extravaganza. They are not very good songs, nor is Jeanmaire's English accent impeccable. But she sings with so much temperament that the songs seem fresh and spirited. Any one who wants to criticize her English accent should first

present a certificate of competence in French. It would be bad manners to notice her accent, she is so charming and so much more talented than the show in which she is appearing.

"The Girl in Pink Tights" shares with "Kismet" a lust for mediocrity. The score from the studio of the late Sigmund Romberg overflows with mechanical melodies out of a departed era. Leo Robin has written lyrics that match the commonplaceness of those in "Kismet." "Why do I have to wax poetic?" Mr. Robin's grandest lover sighs in one of his most transfixed moods. Well, why not? Why must the words of songs sound feeble-minded? One by one the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows depart, leaving us with Pildown man musical entertainment—the triumph of industry over talent.

Amid the hubbub of the plot and the bathos of the music and lyrics, there is a flicker of ability if you look sharp. Agnes de Mille

has arranged some ballets in her second-best manner. Brenda Lewis plays a lady theatrical producer with more gusto than the occasion warrants. As the leader of the ballet, Charles Goldner gives a remarkably humorous performance. Mr. Goldner is a Viennese actor who most recently made something pretty funny out of a conventional part in "Dear Charles" in London. He is an angel of mercy in "The Girl in Pink Tights." He is full of personality. He is a master of timing and the droll inflection, and a solid asset in this shaky show.

"The Girl in Pink Tights" is a gigantic production. Eldon Elder has designed miles of scenery, some of which bursts into counterfeit flames after the fashion of cheap melodramas a half century ago. Miles White has designed a very attractive wardrobe of costumes. It's a heavy show. Logically enough, its one distinction is something light, gay and entrancing—Jeanmaire. Jeanmaire is full of talent.

Journal American

March 6, 1954

Jeanmaire Stars In New Musical Good Romberg Score Includes 3 Hit Songs

By **JOHN McCLAIN**

ANY FAIR estimation of "The Girl in Pink Tights," which opened officially at the Mark Hellinger last night, must be an appraisal of Jeanmaire, the little French sprite who dominates the proceedings.

She sings, dances and acts all evening long, and if you are entirely hypnotized by her you will come away believing you've seen a whale of a show.

If you have slight reservations about her, as I'm afraid I did (when I couldn't understand her, for instance), you are apt to realize suddenly that she is surrounded by a fair amount of mediocre extravaganza.

There is a great deal of ballet, for instance, but the only number that seemed singularly

bright or original was a parody ballet in the second act. There is quite a good score by Sigmund Romberg, including two, maybe three, hit tunes—but much of it is pedestrian.

Big and Beautiful

There is nothing strikingly ingenious about the book, and there is a notable lack of distinction in the humorous episodes. It is big and bountiful all the way, but if you're expecting "Tights" to be terrific

you'd better fall in love with the lass who wears them.

Not that this would be any chore, either. For Jeanmaire is a bewitched and beguiling young lady, a tiny elfin creature with raven, wind-blown hair and a figure that is strangely boyish and feminine in the same simple movement.

It is no news that she is an exquisite dancer, that she has a quality of animal exuberance and the ability to transmit joy to a lackluster line, but I think she leaves something to be desired as a songstress (especially in that big hall) and, as I say, there were many times when her speech didn't penetrate to the fifth row.

Playing with her, and making his bow to Broadway, is a talented comedian named Charles Goldner, who has spent many years in London and on the continent.

I thought he made a noble and ingratiating effort last night, but again I didn't think his material was as hilarious as it

should have been. He is probably best in two musical numbers, "I Promised Their Mothers" and "Love Is The Funniest Thing."

Able Portrayal

Brenda Lewis, an old hand around the music halls, delivers one of her entirely competent portrayals as the proprietress of Niblo's Gardens. She can sing like a bird and still retain a fine flair for the comic line.

One thing you can say about David Atkinson, the young hero of the piece, is that he is big and has a good voice and is almost indistinguishable from several other big young men, with good voices, who always play this same part in similar shows. It isn't the fault of these big men; it's just the part.

If you haven't already heard what "Tights" is about I can tell you in one line that it's the story of a French ballet troupe that gets stranded here when their theatre burns down and they finally join forces with an American company playing a melodrama at an adjacent theatre. Thus the origin of the first musical play.

Shepard Traube has produced all this without sparing many of Anthony B. Farrell's shekels: the sets are numerous and lavish, the costumes luxuriant, but I don't think the Jerome Chodorov-Joseph Fields libretto comes up to the standard of the auspices.

Jeanmaire, thanks to her great gifts, may be able to fight this thing through to a success. In which case she will have practically nobody but herself to thank.

"The Girl in Pink Tights"—continued

Daily Mirror

March 6, 1954

'The Girl in Pink Tights' Is A Tuneful Frolic

BY ROBERT COLEMAN

A skyrocket called Renee Jeanmaire zoomed over the Mark Hellinger's footlights last evening, and set a smart first-night audience to cheering. With a figure that could take a beauty prize any day, a short black windblown hairdo, a piquant face and a pixieish red mouth and huge eyes, she explodes with the effect of a cannon cracker.

SHEPARD TRAUBE, in association with Anthony B. Farrell, is currently starring Jeanmaire in a musical extravaganza called "The Girl in Pink Tights." This is a period piece about how a French ballet troupe and an American stock company got mixed up in old New York shortly after the Civil War.

Jerome Chodorov and Joseph

Fields penned the script. The late Sigmund Romberg composed the score. And Leo Robin supplied the lyrics. If their collaboration is something less than a masterpiece, it does pack lots of excitement, plenty of fun, some swell dancing—straight and satiric—and several tunes that you should be

hearing via jukebox, records, radio and TV.

There are, for instance, a delightful depiction of the opening of the first elevated line in Manhattan; a charming, sentimental pas de deux; a stirring theatre fire; and a hilarious burlesque of a corny bacchanale. These have been superlatively staged by Agnes De Mille.

BUT THERE'S no use talking. It is the electrifying Jeanmaire who sparks the proceedings. She dances with verve and grace. She sings with heart, skill and humor. She makes the romantic thread of the plot seem vastly important. She's an elfin dynamo, an enchanting sprite.

Charles Goldner, who impersonates a ballet impresario that looks just a little like the late Morris Gest, handles the comedy deftly and ingratiatingly. It is evident that he has a fine acting talent. We, for one, should like to see him at some future date on our legitimate stage.

The amazing Brenda Lewis, who won critical raves in such operas as "La Boheme" and "Salome," is another tower of strength. Cast as an actress-manager, she uses her fine voice and comic sense with telling effect. David Atkinson is a manly, actor-playwright. His robust singing is most helpful.

ALEXANDRE KALIOVJNY, from the Paris Opera Ballet, is excellent as a premier danseur. His leaps are thrilling, his beats something to see and his elevation remarkable. He is also that rare asset, a good partner. And appreciative salutes are due Joshua Shelley and Robert Smith.

Thanks to Renee Jeanmaire, and her gifted associates, the Mark Hellinger Theatre is going to be a pleasant place to spend an evening. Leave your super-critical faculties at home, come to the playhouse prepared to enjoy yourself, and you'll have a wonderful time. For "The Girl in Pink Tights" is a high-spirited, handsome and tuneful frolic.



New York World-Telegram

and The Sun

March 6, 1954

Jeanmaire Dazzling at Hellinger

'Girl in Pink Tights' an Old-Fashioned, Romantic Musical

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

This is a great big, old-fashioned, romantic musical comedy, this "Girl in Pink Tights."

It has a lot of virtues and its share of faults. Above all, it has Jeanmaire.



The tiny French explosive is well known from ballet and the screen. In the new musical, she makes all sorts of new impressions. It is likely that she will hereby seal her hold on the New York public for life.

Tiny, Dark, Dazzling.

Jeanmaire is a black diamond at white heat. She is sleek, and tiny, dark and dazzling. She is impudent and authoritative. Essentially, she has that indefinable thing that gives your eyes on her the instant she walks on the stage.

Jeanmaire is one of those rare and remarkable theatrical per-

sonalities whose tangible talent is so unimportant that it might as well be illusory. Probably she can dance very well. Anyway, she looks utterly toothsome in tights. Her lovely legs salute the breezes with great flair, and her smile says it is all wicked but fun.

She sings in the most irrelevant manner. Sometimes she moans a ballad with a tingling result. Again she just plain hollers her song.

Tongue in Cheek.

All that she does is tongue in cheek. She is assured and chic. Jeanmaire has the two greatest qualities an entertainer can claim. Generosity makes her share with you all she enjoys, and her vulnerability urges you to take care of her.

In "The Girl in Pink Tights," she is surrounded by a very complex show. It suffers from relying for humor on its outlandish situations. What the situations need is witty comment.

Lusty and Vivacious.

A French ballet company in post-Civil War New York is

forced to quit when its theater burns down. A neighboring legit house decides to mix the toe dancers into its Wild West melodrama. And that's how musical comedy was born.

Charles Goldner is co-star, as maestro of the ballet company. When you think back over the material he works with, he seems a brilliant comedian to have made it so amusing. He is ever agreeable to have around.

Brenda Lewis plays his counterpart in the legit enterprise. She is lusty and vivacious, and gives her occasional songs plentiful oomph.

An Elegant Impression.

David Atkinson does splendidly with one of those leading juvenile singing heroes, earnest and humorless in love. He sings "Lost in Loveliness" and "In Paris and in Love," which will be on hit parades before long. "When I Am Free to Love" may well join them.

Alexandre Kalloujny makes an elegant impression as the partner of Jeanmaire in the ballet. He has

incredible elevation, and dances with ferocity when given the chance.

Agnes de Mille has handled an unusual problem as choreographer. The whole institution of serious dancing is kidded so often that being serious even for a moment is tricky.

She provides one of the evening's loveliest interludes in a simple slow duet between Jeanmaire and Kalloujny. She further gives the second act a shock with her bacchanale.

It is hard to guess just who thought of having the final big production number done in black, but I am not sure it is advisable. There are pert and eye-catching outfits for the star by Miles White, and delightful scenic illusions by Eldon Elder.

Least forgettable, though, is Jeanmaire, dancing or grinning, pretending to be the whistle on an elevated train, or setting out to seduce a man-about-town. This is a STAR!

"The Girl in Pink Tights"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

March 6, 1954

THEATER

"The Girl in Pink Tights"

By WALTER F. KERR

"THE GIRL IN PINK TIGHTS," which opened last night at the Hellinger, has three tremendous assets—a dancer named Jeanmaire, a singer named Jeanmaire, and a comedienne named Jeanmaire.

The entrancing urchin in question is a diminutive lass with a wicked eye, a shattering smile, a home-made haircut and the general expression of a not-quite-trustworthy kewpie doll. She is—if I may just let myself go—adorable.

For her talents as a dancer, Agnes de Mille has devised a first-act Pas de Deux that moves miraculously above the floor. The moment is breath-taking, perhaps all the more so because of the superb disdain with which the dancer regards her lithe, expressive, self-animating legs. (That's a curious phrase, but the effect is even more curious.)

For her talents as a singer, Don Walker has dipped into a fragmentary score by the late Sigmund Romberg, amplified the

tunes he found there, and offered this petulant powerhouse several workable numbers: a little patter-piece called "Up in the Elevated Railway," a conventional ballad called "In Paris and in Love," a swelling lament called "When I am Free." It is difficult to describe Mlle. Jeanmaire's singing voice. Partly, it's a yip. Somehow or other the girl finds an occasional note she can send swooping into the rafters—it's sort of like the swiftest upsurge on a drunken roller-coaster—and she pipes out the rest of them in a sustained nasal whine that Fiat herself could hardly improve upon. My only regret is that she is not singing all of the songs in the show; they would sound less conventional.

For her talents as a comedienne—alas—librettists Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields have supplied virtually nothing at all. You know that there is a spirited and inventive clown in her, because of the way she shrugs antio shoulders, because of the

way she flips off a tiara when she finds a room too warm, because of the bewitching impudence she reads into a line like "Today I am probably superb." But you must watch closely for these glancing effects; the authors are in very dull form.

"The Girl in Pink Tights" is not a show with too few jokes. It is a show with practically no jokes at all. The authors have interested themselves in a bit of factual Americana. A French ballet troupe has arrived in New York not long after the Civil War. The theater in which it hopes to appear burns down. The ballets are immediately incorporated into a wild-west melodrama of the period ("The Black Crook" is the inspiration for these "random goings-on") and the man who has written the melodrama is understandably incensed. He becomes less incensed as, like the rest of us, he falls in love with Jeanmaire.

But the Messrs. Chodorov and Fields have told their tale very literally, very baldly, and very badly. Instead of sparkling, the situations stand still. Any one of the first six numbers could be the opening number for a show still to come. Long dialogue passages plod by like this:

"I survived Gettysburg and Vicksburg."

"That was only bullets and cannon. This is a woman."

Between times, the songs and dances have the aimless improvisational air of straight filler. The score has a decidedly attractive ballad in "Lost in Lovellness" and a good show-tune in that lively "Elevated Railway" jam-boree; but too many of the songs sound as though they have been developed from the same Romberg original rather than from an ample supply.

Not that there aren't a few other attractive images to back up Jeanmaire. Eldon Elder's settings, for instance, are extraordinarily fresh in feeling and in line for musical-comedy stuff: a wavering "El" line over Bowling Green, a charming period theater with limply hanging drops, gas lamps, and cracked plaster; a forest of spindly masts beside the Pier at Battery Park. Agnes de Mille has given us lively fragments, too: a line of girls at the ballet bar, a trio of men working in surrealist union behind Jeanmaire. Charles Goldner, Brenda Lewis, Alexandre Kalloujny, and David Atkinson are all thoroughly attractive performers.

In fact, I'd like to concentrate on the evening's virtues because I think you ought to see Jeanmaire. But conscience compels the admission that the Hellinger show, as a show, is relentlessly uninspired.

"The Burning Glass"

DAILY NEWS

March 5, 1954

'The Burning Glass' a Sober Play About Some Man-Made Hell-Fire

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Comparison must be made between "The Burning Glass," which the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson offered last evening at the Longacre Theatre, and "Wings Over Europe," which the Theatre Guild offered at the Martin Beck in 1928. They are, roughly speaking, the same play, and the 1928 model was livelier and better.

Twenty-five years ago Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne wrote a melodrama which was more perceptive than anybody realized either then or for many years afterward. As Burns Mantle described "Wings Over Europe," "the hero is a youthful scientist who, by discovering a formula by which

he can control the atom, harnessing its boundless energy and releasing man from his slavery to matter, hopes to divert his discovery to the everlasting glory of mankind." One of the authors, Nichols, confessed, "It is an extravaganza—a ballet of ideas." Nobody knew that he and Browne were years

ahead of Nagasaki, Hiroshima and the Eniwetok Atoll.

The Same Secret,

Last evening's drama—which comes from England as the first one did—is by Charles Morgan. In it the hero is a youthful scientist who discovers that he can control the energy of the sun. With his secret he can release man from his slavery to matter—or, in case of war, burn an enemy land to ashes.

Both young scientists had got hold of something hot, and each of them dumped the problem of what

"THE BURNING GLASS"

Play by Charles Morgan; staged by Luther Kennett; setting by Oliver Smith; costumes by Noel Taylor; lighting by John Davis; presented by the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson at the Longacre Theatre, March 4, 1954. The cast:

Christopher Terriford, ... Scott Forbes
Lady Terriford, ... Isobel Elsom
Mary Terriford, ... Maria Riva
Tony Lack, ... Walter Matthau
Gerry Hardlip, ... William Roerick
Lord Henry Strait, ... Ralph Clanton
Montagu Winthrop, ... Cedric Hardwicke
Inspector Wigg, ... Basil Howes

to do in the lap of Britain's Prime Minister. In the earlier play, the young scientist had the PM in terror, threatening to blow up London at the tick of a watch if the government didn't endorse Peace and the League of Nations. It was

"The Burning Glass"—continued

little more than a skillful melodrama.

Last night's new play is less a melodrama than it is an ethical discussion, even though it does have some moments of tension. Mr. Morgan, having given his hero the same power over nature that the first one had, makes an interesting philosophical switch. This new hero, as high-minded as the old one was, is willing to give his secret to his country in case of war—but he is determined not to give it up for peaceful purposes. Man's

mastery of nature, the young man maintains, has already exceeded man's mastery over himself—so why give him more natural power to run more peacetime gadgets?

Profound and Placid.

It is an interesting question, and a profound one. It is discussed clearly and literately, with many quotations from the Bible and the classical poets, in "The Burning Glass." But the discussion is not particularly exciting in terms of our kind of theatre; quite often it

stirs the mind, but rarely the pulse. Even though it does manage an international kidnapping and a noble suicide, it is a placid drama.

The most interesting performances are given by Scott Forbes as the young scientist who has harnessed the power of the sun and by Cedric Hardwicke as the inevitable Prime Minister who suddenly finds the whole world dumped in his lap. Forbes is intense, exalted and stubborn; Hardwicke is bland, cynical and wise.

Maria Riva, Mariene Dietrich's

daughter, acts nicely and occasionally vigorously as the scientist's wife, and Walter Matthau gives a good performance as another scientist who, upon realizing that he knows too much about a dreadful secret, destroys himself so that nobody else may get it from him. And there is an unusually sinister portrait of an international spy, swiftly sketched by William Roerick. Isabel Elsom fills in as the mother of the scientist. But "Wings Over Europe" scared me more.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

March 5, 1954

'The Burning Glass' Opens at Longacre

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Charles Morgan has several ideas which convey challenging truth in his new play "The Burning Glass" at the Longacre.

He expresses them through a melodramatic story. A young man stumbles on a source of power mightier than the atomic bomb. Like atomic discoveries, it might be used either for destruction in war or what is generally considered the advantage of mankind.

Mr. Morgan's thesis is that the increase of man's power over nature is not necessarily an advance. It must be accompanied by spiritual and political improvement.

His story smacks of theater. Shortly after the British scientist realizes the value of his discovery, the Prime Minister of England is called in. Security measures are promised. The scientist gives half of his formula to a doctor and the other half to his wife. He carries the figures in his head and will not write them down.

Hero Kidnaped.

He is kidnaped by the enemy. His wife adjusts the machinery so the enemy can be warned of the new power, but will not release the figures. She is eventually convinced by the Prime Minister that her husband would send the discovery to America.

An assistant in the weather control laboratory loves her. He admits in the end that he has memorized the figures and kills himself as the only way to protect them.

The enemy backs down, and the scientist is returned. He will always release this new force for protection in war. In peace he will secrete it, hoping to end an era of power for power's sake.

This should provide excitement on an intelligent level. It almost does. But the play has odd holes and snarls in its logic. The performance is neither distinguished nor dynamic enough.

The play takes on intellectual virility whenever Cedric Hardwicke appears as the Prime Minister. He is terse, patient and wise. The star gives the play flair and style which make it believable while he is in evidence.

War-Jaded.

Walter Matthau does well as a war-jaded assistant scientist. Maria Riva manages to look like a faithful and loving wife.

Scott Forbes plays the discoverer of the secret, making him steadfast and sturdy. Isabel Elsom is moody and decorative as his mother.

William Roerick has genuine charm, so rare in the play, as the subtly conniving Viennese. Ralph Clanton is handsome and querulous as a lord.

Daily Mirror

March 5, 1954

'The Burning Glass' Noble, But Not Exciting

BY ROBERT COLEMAN

Charles Morgan's "The Burning Glass," which the Theatre Guild and John C. Wilson brought to the Longacre Theatre Thursday evening, attempts to combine philosophy, thwarted romance and science fiction. The blend is not as smooth as it should be. It is a literate play, with nobility of purpose, but seldom a moving or exciting one.

LIKE MOST BRITISH imports, it is on the talky side. Our London cousins have more patience than we do here. Judging by most of the scripts, representative of the current English drama, the gift of gab is popular over there. Perhaps because their tickets cost so much less than do ours.

"The Burning Glass" has to do with a young scientist, who accidentally discovers a way to turn ionospheric particles into a lens capable of utilizing the sun's energies to destroy the earth or parts of it. Before the British Government gets around to giving him adequate protection, he is kidnaped by enemy agents.

His wife, a girl with an extraordinary memory, and a wayward associate scientist manage between them to set the invention for a limited demonstration that results in the enemy's freeing the idealistic inventor. He then offers to reveal his secret to the British Government in the event of war, but not until then.

FOR HE BELIEVES that men less selfless than himself might be tempted to put it to ignoble purposes. His hard-drinking, cynical partner commits suicide for fear that he might give the formula away in a weak moment. And he is also frustrated by his inability to win the affections of his friend's wife.

Cedric Hardwicke is excellent as a patient, understanding Prime Minister. Scott Forbes is good as the dedicated scien-

tist, and Maria Riva most attractive as his wife. Walter Matthau, one of the most likable young actors on our stage, stands out, as usual, as the bitter partner.

William Roerick gives one of the best performances of his career as a sophisticated and ruthless master spy. Isabel Elsom, one of our more capable actresses, makes the most of a not very rewarding part. And Ralph Clanton is properly stiff as a dull State secretary.

LUTHER KENNETT has directed effectively, getting about all that anyone could from the script's mixed moods and verbosity. Oliver Smith has designed a tasteful setting.

"The Burning Glass" reiterates a point with which many of us today agree; science has made more rapid progress than morals or spirituality. As Morgan puts it, we have a giant with a huge, over-developed right arm representing materialistic achievement, and a dwarfed left one symbolic of the humanities.

We respect Morgan's philosophy, and can only regret that he has not developed it with more originality and dramatic impact. It just doesn't come off.

New York Post

March 5, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Man Who Harnessed the Sun

Charles Morgan, author of "The Burning Glass," is, I think, right in his conviction that melodrama is the mood in which the playwright can most accurately capture the spirit of the lurid contemporary world. I'll also go along with him in his assumption that there is great potential theatrical effectiveness in the amalgamation of the stage thriller and the serious drama of ideas. But I fear that his new play, which opened last night at the Longacre Theater, is far from a successful effort to combine these possible virtues in a satisfactory whole.

In a manner reminiscent of a much earlier British play called "Wings Over Europe," Mr. Morgan has tried to set down the impact on international politics and personal lives of the discovery by an idealistic young scientist of an earth-shaking, and

possibly earth-destroying, new instrument of cosmic energy. In the previous drama, the hero, some 15 years before Hiroshima, had hit upon the secret of the atomic bomb. The central figure of "The Burning Glass" has, chiefly by accident, learned how to harness the sun's rays to do the bidding of unworthy mankind.

It is certainly not my intention to go into the similarities and differences of the two plays in any detail, but it may be worth noting that, in both of them, the

young scientist is deeply disturbed over the new force at his command, and the British Prime Minister finds he has his own problem in trying to manage the troubled idealist. It may show how all of us have changed in our attitude toward mass slaughter to note that the hero of the current work is upset, not about the use of his discovery in war, but over the danger of its employment in peace.

Indeed, he is perfectly willing to turn over his overwhelmingly powerful glass to the British government, or even to the Americans, as a weapon against what is carefully referred to merely as "the enemy." Its use in peace, however, he fears might serve "to corrupt the world," and he is convinced he mustn't let this happen. Thereupon, there is much discussion, some interesting but none exactly profound, about the place of science in the modern world and the obligation of the scientist to conceal discoveries he thinks would do harm.

But there is also the melodrama. So the young scientist is kidnapped by a cynical represen-

tative of "the enemy," and it looks for a while as if the result would be war. There is also the fellow-scientist, who is in love with the hero's wife, and has rather a searing soul-struggle of his own. For a few minutes, the resulting suspense is entertaining, just as the contemplation of ideas has its provocative points. The trouble is that the melodrama and the thought, instead of bolstering each other, have a way of running down and growing prolix and aimless.

With Cedric Hardwicke playing the Prime Minister with an engaging combination of outer-stuffiness and inner-humor, Walter Matthau bringing his agreeable gifts to the role of the hero's mixed-up colleague, Ralph Clanton as a pompous aide to the Prime Minister, Scott Forbes and Maria Riva as the young scientist and his wife, William Roerick as the "enemy" agent, and Isobel Elsom as a mother, the acting is not responsible for the play's defects. But "The Burning Glass" is strangely stodgy, save for the melodrama in part of its second act.

Herald Tribune

March 5, 1954

THEATER

"The Burning Glass"

By WALTER F. KERR

"THE BURNING GLASS," which the Theater Guild and John C. Wilson brought to the Longacre last evening, is presumably intended as an intellectual thriller. I begin to doubt that there is any such thing.

Charles Morgan's play is peopled with some very sober, very responsible folk who are mightily enmeshed in some very sober, very responsible problems. A young scientist, Christopher Terrford, has accidentally hit upon a formula for harnessing the power of the sun. As it is explained in the author's rather high-toned prose, mankind has been put in possession of a sort of celestial flame-thrower. An infinite supply of heat comes spilling out of heaven; before it, lizards roast and all life disintegrates.

Christopher— he is always called by his first name, with every syllable given its due—is faced with a dilemma. Shall he hand his secret over to this wicked world, or would it be best

to bury it and let the universe coast for awhile? In general, he is disposed to let friendly nations have it for military purposes—but not for the purposes of peace. The world is bogged down in comfort, he contends; it is high time science stopped corrupting us all with time-saving conveniences and put us to work on our own. Good for us, you know.

"But you are setting the clock back," a Prime Minister sputters.

"No," replies Christopher. "I am refusing to put it forward."

Mr. Morgan's philosophical position seems to me a fairly dubious one, but on this I am open to argument. Less arguable, I think, is the fact that in dressing the debate for the theater the author has mired himself neck-high in nervous melodrama. To make matters exciting, he has apparently found it necessary to turn his upper-class Londoners into dithering idiots.

Christopher, for instance, is

intent upon keeping his formula a close secret. He has, therefore, told it to very few people—just enough to have the information circling around the globe. He is also rather loud about it in the living room, with the terrace windows open—and I kept expecting the entire village to troop in with anxious questions any minute. He is careless, too, in another way. He accepts as a guest in his house a charming fellow with a satanic smile and an Austrian accent. (I'd have watched out for the accent, if I'd been Christopher).

Then there is another chap—a fellow-scientist—who is constantly being told not to mention the news, who is constantly letting hints drop nonetheless, and who is constantly biting his tongue over his stupidity. The general remissness does not stop there, though. When, after midnight, there is a genteel tapping at the window-pane of a guarded house, Christopher promptly goes to answer it. Every one is surprised when he is abducted. Later, when everyone is expecting the Enemy to arrive and a suspicious stranger is discovered on the lawn, the functionary in charge is too busy to see him.

It's things like this that set you to wondering about the bunch at Terrford House, and about whether they are likely to do much for the future of mankind, formula or no formula.

The ideals are high; the conduct is somewhat embarrassing.

"The Burning Glass" has its momentary rewards. They occur whenever Cedric Hardwicke is on stage. The owlish Sir Cedric, who has mostly devoted himself to improving television of late, is cast as a sensible, human, ruefully reflective Prime Minister. Whether he is puzzling his way through some baffling scientific terminology, silencing a chatty matron, or observing—in the course of a war-and-peace debate—that he was himself a very destructive little boy, he is just fine.

Otherwise, Maria Riva—who has inherited from Mother Dietrich something of that enchantress' noble bone-structure—is poised, throaty, and coolly efficient as Christopher's loyal wife; Walter Matthau wrestles vigorously with the unkind role of the talkative associate; and Isobel Elsom, Scott Forbes, Ralph Clanton and William Roerick are all handsomely mannered.

I guess the only really constructive criticism I have this morning is this: when a stage mirror isn't a real mirror and doesn't reflect anything, nobody should tie his tie in front of it. Walter Matthau attempted the feat last night and emerged with something truly fascinating.